



Giunia Gatta

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Visiting Scholar, Mershon Center

"Theorizing Among Ruins: An Existentialist Perspective on Political Violence"

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Violence has been an elusive presence in contemporary political theory, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon academic world. Most theorists have focused on notions of reasonable disagreement, or have celebrated "agonal" forms of politics and vigorous contestation, but without paying much heed to massacre, torture, genocide or even just violence.

Hannah Arendt, one of the theorists of the 20th century who has taken violence more seriously, believes that theory cannot do anything different: Where absolute violence rules, politics – and hence political theory – are silent. In this talk, I consider the contribution of German philosopher Karl Jaspers to a possible mode of theorizing violence, in particular the experience of violence, as defining trait of human existence and something that political theory cannot afford to ignore. In particular, I dwell on Karl Jaspers's notion of boundary situation as enabling both attention to the fact of struggle and violence and a reflection on the possibility of its episodic overcoming.

Giunia Gatta is a Ph.D candidate in Political Science at the University of Minnesota and a Visiting Scholar at the Mershon Center. Her fields of concentration are political theory and international relations, and she is particularly interested in what both fields contribute to our understanding of political violence. She is currently completing her dissertation tentatively entitled "Theorizing Among Ruins: An Existentialist Perspective." She is also the author of a book manuscript on the liberalism of Judith Shklar.